

TAXI LICENSING VEHICLE STANDARDS POLICY

Report of the Director of Place Management

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents members with a set of recommendations relating to a series of Taxi and Private Hire Licensing vehicle standards and conditions of licence.
- 1.2 The recommendations are set out in **Appendix A** and are aligned with Stage 2 of the Greater Manchester Minimum Licensing Standards (MLS), which has already been implemented in Stockport in relation to new to licence vehicles and 7 of the other GM authorities.
- 1.3 The recommendations have been developed with some amendments to Stage 2 of MLS following local consultation, relatively recent publication of the Department for Transport statutory standards and guidance, and developments in the Greater Manchester Clean Air Plan, along with proposals for funding options to encourage the take up of cleaner, more environmentally friendly vehicles.
- 1.4 Approval is sought from Members to implement the amended standards from 8th February 2024 for new to licence vehicles, and with a transitional date of 31st December 2025 for the compliance of existing vehicle licensees.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Stockport Council has the statutory responsibility for administering, regulating and setting fees for Taxi and Private Hire licensing within the local authority area. Taxi and Private Hire regulation seeks to protect the public, businesses and the environment in order to promote public safety.
- 2.2 Members will be aware that Stage 1 of the MLS was approved by Members on 29th September 2021 in relation to drivers, private hire operators and local authority standards, along with Stage 2 of the MLS as it relates to new to licence vehicle applicants on 6th July 2022. This report follows on from the July 2022 report, which recommended that governance of Stage 2 be implemented partially for new to licence applicants in order to provide control over new vehicles coming onto the fleet in terms of age and emissions standards. It further recommended that the position in relation to existing licensees would be reviewed once there was further clarity on the Clean Air Taxi Fund proposals.
- 2.3 The MLS recommendations were developed by the Greater Manchester Licensing Network, a group of all 10 Licensing Managers within GM and were endorsed by GMCA on 29th October 2021 . Throughout the development of the standards, the work has been closely linked with the Clean Air Plan in terms of funding for the upgrade of licensed vehicles in order to comply with the Clean Air emissions targets.

- 2.4 The main mission of the MLS being implemented across GM is to drive up taxi and private hire standards across the region to improve public safety and the environmental impacts of the taxi and private hire industry working throughout GM.
- 2.5 The standards officers seek to adopt and finalise, for both new and existing licensees, are set out in **Appendix A** to this report and are further explained within the body of this report.
- 2.6 These proposals have a focus on the emission standards as a mechanism to upgrade vehicles, with a view to assisting the fleet to contribute to the meeting of emission targets in the shortest time possible. This is whilst providing a level of control over the number of non-compliant vehicles on the Stockport fleet and providing clarity to licensees on expectations and timescales. This has a focus on reducing the environmental impact of the fleet whilst supporting the transition of existing licensees in upgrading to compliance.
- 2.7 The broader rationale for implementing the standards in **Appendix A** at this time is as follows:
- 2.7.1 Many existing licensees are in an uncertain position in terms of purchasing a new vehicle which complies with emissions, adoption of the standards will provide that clarity, a route to compliance, and a level of reassurance that the transition date will be subject to review should the proposed funding position change.
- 2.7.2 Adopting the standards puts Stockport licensees in a stronger position should the Clean Air funding proposals be accepted by government.
- 2.7.3 Delaying implementation for the existing vehicle licensees risks older, more polluting non-compliant vehicles being permitted onto the Stockport fleet indefinitely. Adoption of these standards would provide clarity to the trade, with a workable transitional period, whilst also safeguarding any regulatory criteria on the eligibility of funding.
- 2.8 Associated known risks:
- 2.8.1 Not adopting these standards is a risk should the Clean Air Taxi funding offer be opened and be dependent on an emissions standard being in place.
- 2.8.2 There is a further associated risk should all 10 GM authorities not be in a position to implement an emission standard as has been put forward in the Clean Air Plan submission to Government. This is because compliance with the legal direction may not be achieved because the modelled outcome is based on the assumption that all 10 fleets are compliant by 31st December 2025, alongside the risk of licence shopping within GM whilst policies on new licences are not in place across the board.
- 2.8.3 Officers therefore recommend that the date for final transition be subject to review should the funding position change from those put forward in the proposal to government.

3. CONSULTATION FINDINGS

- 3.1 A consultation on the standards took place between October and December 2020. In total across Greater Manchester, nearly 1700 responses were received with 59% of

responses being from the public, 21% from private hire drivers and 14% from hackney carriage drivers.

- 3.2 The consultation findings both across GM as a whole, and locally in Stockport, were considered in forming the resultant set of standards.
- 3.3 Since this time officers have consulted locally with the Trade Association Stockport (TASK) the recognised trade body representing Hackney Carriage vehicle drivers and owners, and carried out discussions with private hire operators in order to form a revised set of standards.

4. THE STANDARDS

- 4.1 Officers have reviewed the recommended standards contained in Stage 2 of the GM MLS seeking to strike a balance to improve the age, emission and safety standards aligning with current guidance, whilst also aiming to reduce the risk of licence shopping of drivers to other districts inside and outside of GM.
- 4.2 The standards will remain under constant review with GM Licensing Managers, with a view to ensuring they remain appropriate, are relevant and align with standards and guidance.
- 4.3 The following background and rationale should be read in conjunction with **APPENDIX A** which sets out the proposed standards.

4.4 Standard 1 – Vehicle emissions

- 4.4.1 Taxi and Private Hire vehicle measures represent an important mechanism for reducing nitrogen dioxide exceedances under the GM investment-led Clean Air Plan. They are grounded in the ability of the GM authorities to reduce emissions through licensing conditions. GM's investment-led plan which has been submitted to government, proposes using the Clean Air funding already awarded for investment in taxi and private hire vehicle upgrades through a Clean Taxi Fund, along with other wider proposals involving zero emission buses and measures to manage traffic flows in some roads within other GM areas.
- 4.4.2 As part of this proposal, modelling has shown that the investment-led, non-charging plan can bring Nitrogen Dioxide levels within legal limits. However, it is for government to determine what measures GM is to implement, only the investment-led plan complies with the requirement placed on the 10 GM local authorities to deliver compliance in the shortest possible time and by 2026 at the latest.
- 4.4.3 The appraisal of the investment-led plan has been developed on the basis that an emissions standard, requiring licensed taxis and private hire vehicles to be a minimum of Euro 6 (diesel) or Euro 4 (petrol) by 31st December 2025, will have been adopted by all GM Authorities.

- 4.4.4 This means that licences issued by Stockport Council will have to have a compliant vehicle attached to the licence by 31st December 2025 at the latest. Licensees can apply at any time during the currency of their licence to replace the vehicle attached to that licence, and therefore must ensure that they have sourced and purchased an emissions compliant vehicle in good time to ensure they have a compliant vehicle licensed by 31 December 2025. Officers will advise the trade further with regards to application deadlines to ensure sufficient time for processing and vehicle testing prior to the licence being issued.
- 4.4.5 The investment-led plan assumes that by 2026, 100% of the GM taxi fleets will be compliant with the emissions standards. It is intended that the Clean Taxi Fund will support this providing sufficient funds for every current non-emissions compliant vehicle licensed to a GM authority receive grant support (if eligible). Further the fund is to be opened before 2025 enabling earlier upgrades, and helping to mitigate against the risk of taxis re-licensing with another authority that does not have the same emission standard requirement.
- 4.4.6 As a result of this, the Air Quality Administration Committee recommended that each GM Authority puts appropriate arrangements in place to facilitate a transitional start date for the implementation of emission standards by the 1st January 2025 with the end transition date being the 31st December 2025.
- 4.4.7 The report on the GM investment-led plan has been submitted to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs setting out the proposals. Whilst we await their response the GM Authorities will, on the anticipation of the Clean Taxi Fund being agreed, make preparations to ensure a minimum taxi emissions standard will have been adopted by all GM Authorities.
- 4.4.8 A Clean Taxi Fund (CTF) of £30.5m is proposed to offer funding to support upgrades of taxis to cleaner vehicles through two routes. These are:
- Core Taxi Fund of £22.5m – based on the 2021 GM CAP Policy, the funding is eligible to non-compliant, GM-licensed hackneys and PHVs. The financial support has been uplifted with inflation, with an associated air quality benefit derived from minimum emission standards across the 10 GM Authorities.
 - Electric Hackney Upgrade Fund of £7.9m – based on the Bradford scheme¹ and feedback received during GM's Participatory Policy Development²; the funding is available to compliant Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) hackneys and seeks to support upgrades to the cleanest vehicle type whilst taking into account feedback.
- 4.4.9 It is recommended that the transitional date of 31st December 2025 is subject to further review should there be any changes to the funding levels set out in the Clean Taxi Fund proposals to government. This is in order to safeguard licensees from potential impacts of insufficient funding options to upgrade.

¹ Bradford Council, who operate a Category C charging Clean Air Zone, have launched an additional fund to support Bradford-licensed Hackneys to upgrade to fully electric. The fund is open to owners of Bradford which are already classed as compliant with minimum emissions standards.

² [Participatory Policy Development - Summary of Stakeholder Engagement Report](#) Page 14, point 8

4.5 Standard 2 - Vehicle age limit

- 4.5.1 A broadly applied vehicle age limit is not recommended by officers at this time following the publication of the DfT taxi and private hire vehicle licensing best practice guidance for licensing authorities which was updated in November 2023.
- 4.5.2 The guidance does not recommend imposing an age limit for the licensing of vehicles and instead recommends a more targeted requirement to meet their policy objectives on emissions, safety rating and increasing wheelchair accessible provision.
- 4.5.3 Officers are also aware that a number of local authorities have already begun reviewing and/or consulting on removal of an age limit on their fleets, and are mostly seeking to replace that with an emissions standard, as is proposed here.
- 4.5.4 Given the DfT recommendations, and that Stockport does not currently have an age limit standard in place for existing vehicles, it is recommended that Stockport do not implement an age limit at this time, other than in respect of retrofitted engines whose age would not be controlled otherwise. The authority will already have a level of control over age limits by virtue of the proposed emissions standard, as follows:

Euro Standard	Date of first registration	Resultant age-limit
Euro 4 petrol	1 st January 2006	18 years
Euro 6 diesel	1 st September 2015	8 years

This is because all Euro 4 petrol engines were first registered after 1st January 2006 making them 18 years old or younger, and most diesel engines were first registered after 1st September 2015 making them 8 years or younger. This effective age-limit will increase as time goes on and until standards change, however it does provide an element of control over vehicle age limits whilst most importantly achieving compliance with the emissions standard.

- 4.5.5 There is currently an upper age limit in place for new vehicles coming onto the fleet, officers recommend removing this age-limit in line with this proposal.
- 4.5.6 Stockport Hackney Carriage trade reps are keen to explore the potential option of the retrofitting of older vehicles as a route to compliance with the emission standard. Although retrofitting is not included in the GM investment-led plan as a funding option, trade reps have asked that this is not excluded as an option to the Stockport trade until the position is clearer in terms of the efficacy of retrofit technology. Due to the significant investment required to purchase a new compliant Hackney Carriage vehicle compared to a standard saloon, officers have sought ways to accommodate this request until the position on the emerging landscape is clearer. In order to control the age of vehicles with retrofit technology, officers recommend an upper age-limit in respect of retrofitted

vehicles only. This will be subject to review and dependent on outcomes of further central research in this area. It is important to note that there is no retrofitting option included in the funding proposals and so this option is in place to support licensees who may wish to explore this outside of the funding.

4.6 Standard 3 – Vehicle Testing

- 4.6.1 This standard reaffirms the existing Stockport Council testing standards, that all vehicles be tested at 6 monthly intervals against the DVSA MOT standard as a minimum.
- 4.6.2 This is with the exception of newly registered vehicles, that following an initial test, they will be exempt from further 6 month tests, but must be tested annually on renewal, up to the age of 3 years since first registration, in line with standard MOT guidelines for testing.
- 4.6.3 This does not preclude any direction by Taxi Licensing for the vehicle to be tested before that time. This is with a view to reducing the burdens on drivers who have invested in new and compliant vehicles.
- 4.6.4 A set of Taxi Licensing testing standards for vehicle testers and vehicle licensees are currently being developed, and will shortly be consulted on, to support the testing of vehicles in relation to the approved policy.

4.7 Standard 4 – Vehicle Design

- 4.7.1 This standard applies to vehicle type and design and confirms a number of standards already in place.

4.8 Standard 5 – Vehicle Licence Conditions

- 4.8.1 This standard proposes a revised set of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicle conditions.
- 4.8.2 These conditions are already approved for new licensees and so this will align both new and existing licensee conditions of licence.
- 4.8.3 The set of conditions are available on our website to view via the link below, as they apply to new to licence vehicles.

[Hackney carriage vehicle conditions - Stockport Council](#)

[Private hire vehicle conditions - Stockport Council](#)

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Members are asked to consider the recommendations contained in this report, and resolve to approve them for implementation from 8th February 2024 for new to licence vehicles, and with a transitional period for existing licensees up to 31st December

2025, at which time all vehicles licensed by Stockport Council must be compliant with the approved set of vehicle standards.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Sarah Tooth by email taxi.licensing@stockport.gov.uk